

Historical Memory and the Plea for a National Interests Based German Foreign Policy

Nijhuis, Ton

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Nijhuis, T. (1998). Historical Memory and the Plea for a National Interests Based German Foreign Policy. *Sociologický časopis / Czech Sociological Review*, 6(2), 205-217. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-54312>

Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer Deposit-Lizenz (Keine Weiterverbreitung - keine Bearbeitung) zur Verfügung gestellt. Gewährt wird ein nicht exklusives, nicht übertragbares, persönliches und beschränktes Recht auf Nutzung dieses Dokuments. Dieses Dokument ist ausschließlich für den persönlichen, nicht-kommerziellen Gebrauch bestimmt. Auf sämtlichen Kopien dieses Dokuments müssen alle Urheberrechtshinweise und sonstigen Hinweise auf gesetzlichen Schutz beibehalten werden. Sie dürfen dieses Dokument nicht in irgendeiner Weise abändern, noch dürfen Sie dieses Dokument für öffentliche oder kommerzielle Zwecke vervielfältigen, öffentlich ausstellen, aufführen, vertreiben oder anderweitig nutzen.

Mit der Verwendung dieses Dokuments erkennen Sie die Nutzungsbedingungen an.

Terms of use:

This document is made available under Deposit Licence (No Redistribution - no modifications). We grant a non-exclusive, non-transferable, individual and limited right to using this document. This document is solely intended for your personal, non-commercial use. All of the copies of this documents must retain all copyright information and other information regarding legal protection. You are not allowed to alter this document in any way, to copy it for public or commercial purposes, to exhibit the document in public, to perform, distribute or otherwise use the document in public.

By using this particular document, you accept the above-stated conditions of use.

Historical Memory and the Plea for a National Interests Based German Foreign Policy

TON NIJHUIS*

German Institute Amsterdam, University Maastricht, The Netherlands

Abstract: The events of 1989 and unification changed Germany's position in Europe significantly. Although German politicians stress continuity, it cannot be denied that the European map has changed and that the FRG has been forced to reorient its foreign policy. Historical memory is a key organising principle in the making of a foreign policy, and nowhere more so than in Germany. In this paper the relationship between historical memory and contemporary foreign policy is not only seen from the perspective of the question of how remembering the past influences ideas about contemporary politics, but also its opposite: what is the role of the debate on a new German foreign policy in the ongoing struggle on the interpretation of the German past and the German national identity?. This question is especially relevant, since the battle for cultural dominance has been fought with renewed vigour since unification.

Czech Sociological Review, 1998, Vol. 6 (No. 2: 205-217)

Egon Bahr, the major architect of Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik* once said in an interview that after the building of the Berlin Wall in 1962 it took them seven years to develop a new concept for a German policy that could replace the *Politik der Härte* of Adenauer. It is now eight years since the Berlin Wall came down, and there is still no trace of a new, more or less coherent concept of a new German foreign policy. However, this is not really astonishing and it would be unfair to blame contemporary politicians and foreign policy specialists for being less inventive and creative than their colleagues in the 1960's.

When we compare the building of the Berlin Wall with its fall, the first was only a minor event, with mainly internal German significance. The map of Europe remained unchanged, so did the bipolar system. The Berlin Wall was in fact a confirmation of the post-war relations that had already developed and stabilised.

If we compare this with what happened after 1989: not only do we see the unification of the two German states, but also the collapse of state structures in Eastern European countries, the break-up of the USSR, the end of the bipolar system, the bloody war in the former Yugoslavia, uncertainty about the future role of the US in Europe, uncertainty about the future tasks and goals of the main international organisations in which the Western European countries co-operate, and which were the product of, or at least created during, the Cold War, such as NATO and the EU.

Each of these problems is difficult enough to handle on its own, but together they create an even more complex situation because one gets unavoidably stuck in dilemmas and contradictions. Examples of dilemmas in German foreign policy are: whether to widen the EU or deepen it, the tension between having a good relationship with Russia as well as with the other Eastern European countries such as Poland; maintaining a special relationship with France but also with the US, being accused of creating a wide sphere of

*) Direct all correspondence to Ton Nijhuis, Universiteit Maastricht, Postbus 616, 6200 MD Maastricht, e-mail ton.nijhuis@history.unimaas.nl

influence in the centre of Europe, and of being too passive, and so on. Almost every step in Germany's foreign policy is carefully watched by its neighbours and allies. And every step is criticised by at least some of them. In short, Germany, more than any other Western power, has to consider very different and often contradictory outside interests. The times are over for '*Genscherism*' in foreign politics, which was characterised by a '*Sowohl-als-Auch*' strategy and in which it was Germany's main aim to be everybody's friend.

The instinctive reaction to this new and difficult situation in Bonn was: the more historic changes we experience, the more we should stress continuity. And so they did. Time and again the German government and German politicians assured themselves and their foreign partners that nothing had really changed.

The Social Democratic Opposition was even less creative in formulating a new foreign policy concept. Their policy can best be described as a mixture of 'business as usual' and thoughtless, opportune adjustments. The old policy of creating stability in Europe by means of *Ostpolitik*, arms reductions and the OSCE were no longer applicable and the ideal of the UN as the peacekeeper of the world, with an international monopoly of power may have been naively attractive but not very realistic. All the more so, because the SPD was at first quite unwilling to participate in military intervention ordered or sanctioned by the UN. However useful this 'nothing-has-really-changed' reaction may be in trying to convince neighbouring countries and allies that the new Federal Republic is not a threat to the European state-system, it is not possible stick to the concept of foreign policy as elaborated during the Cold War. This does not only apply to Germany but to all other countries as well. France, the UK and the US are also having a hard time defining their position in the post-Cold War world and in elaborating new foreign policies.

In Germany we face the paradoxical situation that before unification, the country had only limited power and degrees of freedom in foreign policy, but knew exactly what its goals and co-ordinates were. After unification, there is a feeling that it has more power, and should somehow make use of it, but the questions of for what, how much, what goals, and by what means... all remain unanswered.

A foreign policy cannot be changed in one fell swoop. It is a historically developed entity which creates a form of national foreign policy identity. The evolution of a foreign policy, as W. Besson once said, consists of experiences becoming maxims. Historical memory is thus a key organising principle in the making of foreign policy and nowhere more so than in Germany [Smith et al. 1996: 137]. On the other hand, of all of the continuities in the factors which influence foreign policy, historical memory is probably the least constant, as William Paterson remarks [Paterson 1996]. Therefore, it is not surprising that in the German debates on a new foreign policy the question of which lessons can be learned from history is always a core issue. And it is this relation between historical memory and contemporary foreign policy that plays a key role in this paper. However, when raising the issue of this relationship between past and present, I would like to change the perspective and not ask the usual question of how remembering the past influences ideas about contemporary politics [see e.g. Berger 1997], but the opposite: what is the role of the debate on a new German foreign policy in the ongoing struggle over the interpretation of the German past and the German national identity? And this question is especially relevant, since the battle for cultural dominance has been fought with renewed vigour in Germany since unification.

I intend to discuss a view of the central concepts and ideas which figure prominently in the discussion about the new German foreign policy, criticise the way they are used and show that these concepts reveal more about how people want to interpret the past than about their concrete ideas of what the current foreign policy of Germany looks like, or should be. The central concepts or ideas I will briefly discuss are: the concept of national interests, the concepts of *Normalität* and *Normalisierung*, and the idea of a German *Sonderweg*.

The Question of National Interests

There are not many states which present their actions in international politics as expressions of naked egoistic power politics. Most of the time the goals a country is striving for, are legitimised or justified by referring to higher values than only the national interests. Without doubt, the Federal Republic is the world champion in referring to values that exceed the interests of a single nation. Fear of being accused of secret German nationalist sentiments, has certainly played an important role in the creation of the semantics of a politics of responsibility. Moreover, there is also the fear, especially on the Left, that accepting a semantic in which German interests are central will awaken old German ghosts.

The supranational, anti-nationalistic character of presenting the goals of German foreign policy is shown in three different ways. Firstly there is a preference for formulating goals in very general normative ideals and concepts, such as freedom, democracy, peace and human rights. References to power are avoided. Germany should not be seen as a *Machtsstaat* but as a *Zivilmacht* whose policy can best be described as a *Verantwortungspolitik*, and all mention of national interests is to be avoided [e.g. Maull 1997]. Secondly, in German political culture one does not speak in solistic terms; there is a strong emphasis on multilateralism, on co-operation with neighbouring countries and allies, on joint efforts to realise goals in international politics and on collective institutions.

The emphasis which is placed on multilateralism, and the frequency with which this term is used, shows that there is more at stake than the simple fact that sometimes it is more effective to formulate and realise goals in co-operation with your allies, than to do it alone. Equally important, is the idea of multilateralism as a goal in itself and not just a means. One could say that the Federal Republic constructed its identity through its European and multilateral policy. The unilateral-multilateral dichotomy is associated with the distinction between egoism and altruism, so the concepts are not only part of the semantics of foreign policy, but also of morality.

Thirdly, post-war German political culture is one of restraint, characterised by a desire to avoid an explicit international leadership role. In brief, Germans prefer a European institutional context for implementing their national policies, shy away from purely national justifications, and try to avoid the impression that Germany is striving for national independence of actions, or for heavy-handed political influence.

Even before unification this foreign-policy culture in Germany was deplored by a small, but influential, circle of observers of German foreign policy, including Arnulf Baring, a professor of history in Berlin and regular commentator in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Gregor Schöllgen, professor at Erlangen University and a frequent speaker at the Foreign Office's attaché training courses, Michael Stürmer, the director of the *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik* in Ebenhausen – the government's think-tank for for-

eign policy, Christian Hacke, professor at the Bundeswehr University in Hamburg, and Hans-Peter Schwarz, professor of contemporary history at Bonn University.

It was especially the book by Hans-Peter Schwarz, *Die gezähmten Deutschen. Von der Machtsbesessenheit zur Machtvergeessenheit*, published in 1985 that put the cat among the pigeons. Schwarz's central thesis was that the attitude of the Germans to foreign policy swung like a pendulum: public opinion moved from one extreme to the other. The *Machtsverbessenheit*, which characterised Germany in the first half of the century turned into in a *Machtvergeessenheit*. The way Schwarz has chosen his concepts makes clear that he does not prefer either of the extremes, but is pleading for a reasonable balance. The terms also make clear that for Schwarz 'power' is not a moral category, something that is 'good' or 'bad', but an instrument which is indissolubly connected with the *Staatsraison*. The fixation on power by which it becomes a goal in itself as well as the ignorance of it will lead to deformations in the foreign policy. Therefore, Schwarz deplores the current state of *Machtvergeessenheit* and pleads for a revaluation of power in German politics.

After unification, the call for a more assertive German foreign policy increased quickly. Germany had to formulate its own national interests just as all the other countries did. To quote Schwarz: "Germany will have to stop imagining that its interests can be 'European', it will have no choice but to recognise that it has national interests and to define them as such." [Schwarz 1994a, 1994b].

Or Schöllgen: "As a reborn nation-state, Germany will have to define its national interests clearly and plainly, both for itself and for others". And to make sure the readers get the message he repeats: "The Federal Republic must define its national interests" [Schöllgen 1994, 1993]. And Günther Gillesen: "Any reliable foreign policy needs a definition of national interests. But in Germany it is difficult to claim 'national interests' and to distinguish between the nation and nationalism. For the guilt-ridden collective national conscience, the term 'national interests' is banned from the domestic debate and widely regarded as 'politically incorrect' language. Yet a nation which is not able to talk about its national interests openly and clearly will appear to pursue a hidden, and perhaps suspect, agenda." [Gillesen 1994].

This message of national interests actually dominates the debate on the new foreign policy. And it is presented in such a way as if to say that if Germany does not realise soon that it has to have a national interests policy, the apocalypse is near.

The plea for a foreign policy that is centred around national interests can be summarised in five points:

- 1) National interests do exist. They cannot be subsumed under more general interests, and neither do they fall apart in particular interests of separate groups within the state or within society.
- 2) The national interest is the basic principle that determines the actions of states in the international arena.
- 3) The Federal Republic has been neglecting its national interests for 40 years.
- 4) Germany has to free itself from its special status in international politics. It has to become a 'normal' country with a 'normal' *staatsraison*, and with 'normal' rights and duties.

- 5) If the Federal Republic does not openly formulate its national interests or pretends it has none, other countries can do little else than interpret this as an effort to conceal its actual goals and work to a hidden agenda.

These points are presented as though they are self evident. But in fact this is not the case at all.

It cannot be denied that in Germany there is a strong tendency to translate national interests into supranational goals. However, there is something lacking in the creation of a contradistinction between national interests and European or other supranational interests. It is an open question whether national interests and international interests are negatively related, or are indifferent to one another, or dependent upon each other. This question has to be determined in each individual case, and concerns content as well as practical application and realisation. But surely they do not stay in a zero-sum relationship to one another by principle.

Also, the idea that Germany after unification finally has to act as a 'normal' state and in accordance with its national interests is more problematic than appears at first glance. It bears the implicit assumption or suggestion that the old Federal Republic neglected its national interests or subordinated them to the interests of a greater whole. However, the thesis that the Federal Republic has been quite successful in defending its interests is easier to defend than the opposite.

It cannot be denied that the Federal Republic, because of its past, its limited sovereignty, its geo-political position and its *Westbindung*, played down its foreign policy profile and felt quite comfortable in the shadow of the US. But, the transformation of Germany as a country which was completely destroyed and discredited after the Second World War, into a rich and well-respected state which is prominently represented in almost all major international organisations and surrounded by friendly nations, does not fit with a picture of a country incapable of formulating its own national interests or standing up for them. The Federal Republic was extremely successful in helping create and maintain a framework in which German interests were best served. It is difficult to imagine that a hard-nosed and explicit commitment to national interests, as advocated by the realist school, would have produced the same results. German interests are not served by upsetting existing European arrangements[Markovits and Reich 1997: 44]. This observation can be more generally formulated in a paradox: It is within multilateral organisations that Germany's national power becomes more effective and can be legitimised easier. Multilateralism and European integration enlarges Germany's elbow-room as a national state in international politics.

Another argument in favour of formulating Germany's national interests is that otherwise other countries will assume that Germany is working to a hidden agenda. Thus, instead of the open multilateral trusting politics, there is an atmosphere of secrets and distrust. However, when authors give an indication of these national interests they come up with very general notions, such as integrity of the territory, the safety of the population, welfare, etc. [Hacke 1996]. It is hard to believe that if Germany claims that its territorial integrity or the safety of its citizens is of great importance to it, Germany's neighbours will be so impressed by such openness that they will trust Germany more. It is not possible to find an example of a national interest given which is on the one hand so general that it can be deduced from the *Staatsraison* itself (otherwise we enter the field of

political preferences) and on the other hand so specific that it is at least a little informative.

It is hard to see how such general national interests can be of much help in finding solutions for practical problems and dilemmas in Germany's foreign policy. In fact, national interests often create the dilemmas themselves, because different national interests require different, conflicting policies. Translate national interests into practical decisions and the first dilemmas will arise. In fact, on nearly all important issues decision-makers disagree about what the national interests and the international context demand.

What conclusions can we draw from this brief discussion of the plea for a national interests policy? Firstly, the protagonists of a foreign policy based on national interests fail to demonstrate in which way the concept of national interests could be of help in re-orienting German foreign policy. When national interests are listed, they do not rise above the level of open doors and their specific meanings are never explicated. There is no indication of how these national interests can be translated into practical politics. Not one issue or problem is mentioned of which we can say, that if the German foreign policy had been more national interest oriented then this would have resulted in a more adequate policy. What other policies would Germany have followed with regard to, for example, former Yugoslavia, the Czech Republic or Poland if it had only better explicated its national interests? Which of the many dilemmas which characterise German foreign policy could be solved if one only dared to speak about national interests? [Pulzer 1995].

There is also no indication as to which national interest should be invoked to ensure that Germany's neighbours and allies would be less irritated about the vagueness of its politics. The widespread complaints in Europe about German 'dictates', for example, in relation to monetary union, point in quite a different direction.

Therefore, the actual goals which Baring and others strive for in their pleas for a national interest policy, must be sought elsewhere. What they want is to send the message that Germany cannot permit itself not to be a 'normal' country or to maintain a *Sonderstatus* which is the result of the Second World War. Because of today's challenges Germany has to change her relationship with her own history and this means getting rid of the heavy burden of the Nazi-period. For instance, Baring always complains that German historical consciousness is reduced to the dreadful 12 years between 1933 and 1945 and that this affects the capacity for political action within the arena of international politics [Baring 1991: 197, 1997: 15].

The discussion of national interests in German politics can thus be seen as a continuation of earlier efforts to free Germany of its past (*Entsorgung der Vergangenheit*), to make a *Schlußstrich*, and to normalise its national identity. The wish for normalisation lay at the root of the *Historikerstreit* of 1986 to 1988. The big difference with the *Historikerstreit* is that there normalisation was pursued by a reinterpretation of the Nazi-past itself, by comparing the Holocaust with Stalin's *gulags* which would make the German crimes less unique and therefore Germany less exceptional and thus more able to normalise (*Normalisierungsfähig*). Apart from the quality of particularly Ernst Nolte's contributions, this effort to normalise the Federal Republic by means of a discussion of the historical meaning of this most sensitive issue of the Holocaust, was doomed to fail.

In this sense, the effort to try to normalise German identity by appealing to national interests is probably a more effective strategy. In their generality, they remain vague enough not to lead to big controversies. And perhaps more important: in introducing the

realist ahistorical concept of national interests the past becomes irrelevant, including the German past. The realist theory is used to force Germany to adopt a *Machtspolitik* and to forget about the past.

However, to use the realist theory to normalise Germany is somehow strange. The realist paradigm was meant as a descriptive theory, as a conceptual framework for an adequate description and explanation of international politics. If you complain that German foreign politics are not guided by national interests, then the conclusion must be that the theory fails in explaining the German case. But instead, the realist theory is used as an argument to plead for another German foreign policy. So instead of being descriptive, the theory becomes prescriptive.

Another paradox is that the normalisation of Germany is something which is unavoidable from the perspective of national interests and it is something that Germany has to do on behalf of its neighbouring countries and allies. So the plea that Germany should be more assertive and stand up for its interests is supported by an altruistic argument.

Also on the left of the political spectrum, the discussion of the quest for a new German foreign policy is deeply influenced by the problem of national interests. Before 1990 many were not very enthusiastic about the idea of a German unification. As Günther Grass, but also historians such as Hans-Ulrich Wehler, Heinrich-August Winkler, Hagen Schulze, Jürgen Kocka, and the Mommsen-brothers constantly reiterated, German separation had to be seen as a justified punishment for German crimes and as a guarantee that Europe would not face a third disaster as a consequence of German nationalism. To quote Winkler:

“Angesichts der Rolle, die Deutschland bei der Entstehung der beiden Weltkriege gespielt hat, kann Europa und sollten die Deutschen ein neues Deutsches Reich, einen souveränen Nationalstaat, nicht mehr wollen. Das ist die Logik der Geschichte, und die ist nach Bismarcks Wort genauer als die preußische Oberrechnungskammer.” [Winkler 1997: 172].¹

Paradoxically, those on the Left who warned that German unification would lead to a dangerous entity in the centre of Europe, are also the ones who now assert that nothing really happened, that the Federal Republic did not change in character because of the unification, and that there is no need for a readjustment of Germany's foreign policy. In these assertions there is a normative undertone and rather a lot of wishful thinking. The Federal Republic must, and will retain its old modest status of a gentle giant, and its *Westbindung*. One can almost speak of an old Federal Republic nostalgia. Habermas admits that with regard to the wish to preserve the characteristics of the old Federal Republic the left is outspokenly conservative [Habermas 1995: 93].

The main concern of people of the left with the concept of national interests is not so much the actual foreign policy, but the fear that allowing the semantics of national interests will lead to new nationalistic tendencies in Germany and in Europe. References to national interests are to be distrusted and are immediately identified with nationalistic sentiments and efforts to revise the German past. History teaches that Germany and the other countries should free themselves from nationalism and national identities and should develop another kind of identity based on universal human values as written down in the Constitution, a *Verfassungspatriotismus*, a term introduced by Dolf Sternberger,

¹) In a *mea culpa* Heinrich-August Winkler remembers this remark of his in 1986.

but which has come in vogue after Habermas' call for it. In such a kind of post-national state with a post-national identity there is, of course, little room for national interests. Foreign policy has to become increasingly *Weltinnenpolitik* (D. Senghaas). It should be European interest oriented or, even better, based on universal values. Thus, the rejection of national interests is seen as a national interest. European or international interests are formulated from a national perspective.

However, the rejection of national interests as the point of departure for foreign policy also faces some problems. It leads in fact to the same mistake as the protagonists of national interests made. Here also national interests are seen as the opposite of international or more general interests, and are associated with the moral difference between egoism and altruism.

And how are we supposed to formulate, for instance, European interests when we are not allowed to take the wishes of the separate members as a point of departure? Moreover, don't we need strong and active nation-states to keep the process of European integration moving? And even more important: which guidelines do you use when the other countries do not see the European interest in the same way, for example, when other countries feel nothing for the federal idea of a United States of Europe? When and why do you change your own concepts of a future Europe; where are the limits of your willingness to make compromises? The more you formulate your goals on a supranational level, the less influence you have on the final results, and the more important it is to have clear co-ordinates for your political decisions and for developing alternative options and strategies. Of course, this position also leads to a paradox because the plea for a multilateral, non-national interest policy leads to a foreign policy which is unique in Europe and thus contributes to a nationalisation of foreign politics. The avowal to universal principles and values go hand in hand with provincialism and *Nabelschau*.

What then is the conclusion of this brief discussion of the concept of national interests as it is used in the German public debate on foreign policy. First of all, on both sides of the political spectrum the concept is used, not as a tool for describing or developing German foreign policy, but as a means of influencing the debate on what the German identity is, or should be, and how to cope with German history, the *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Baring, Stürmer, Schwarz, Hacke, Schöllgen and others use the concept in their attempt to normalise Germany and Grass, Habermas, Winkler, Glotz and others are directly opposed to these intentions of normalisation and getting rid of the burdens of the past. Germany should not become normal, the other countries should develop themselves in the same post-national direction as Germany did. In this perspective Germany has learned so much from its history that the country is now able to play a civilising role in world affairs. Hans Maull's concept of *Zivilmacht Deutschland* is an example of this idea, but it is even better illustrated by the following quotation of Peter Glotz:

"Wir haben aus unserer besonderen Geschichte etwas gelernt, wir haben anderen etwas voraus, wir können mit gemäßigten und gemischten Gefühlslagen leben, wir haben das nationale Prinzip stellvertretend für andere zu Ende gedacht. Das macht uns zu einer sehr modernen Nation. Wir können auf die ökonomischen, ökologischen, verkehrspolitischen, kommunikativen Erfordernisse der Europäisierung ohne innere Hemmung reagieren. Von Gefühlsstürmen der nationalen Ehre werden wir selbst in Verhandlungspausen nicht mehr gebeutelt. Wir haben die Chance, eine notwendige Rolle zu spielen: die Rolle der Kundschafter und Pioniere der Europäisierung." [Glotz 1990: 156].

Towards a New Concept of 'National Interests'

This critique of the concept of national interests, as it is used on both sides of the political spectrum in Germany, does not lead to the conclusion that it is a useless conceptual tool of which we have no need. It does, however, needs a thorough revision. I will briefly mention a few things that have to be revised in order to make the concept adequate.

1) Discussions regarding national interests accept too readily the idea that international politics is a zero-sum game. In this view, history is seen as the history of struggles between nation-states. If one country is more successful in realising its national interests then this will be at the expense of other countries. This situation may have been true in the 19th century where the national states saw each other as strategic opponents, and to some extent it was also true in the bipolar system of the Cold War, but it is no longer an adequate way of describing contemporary European politics.

2) We have to do away with the opposition of national and supranational interests. But we should not make the opposite mistake, as many protagonists of the *Weltinnenpolitik* do, and think that they are the same. As long as national governments remain the centre to which people address their wishes and complaints, we can speak about national interests. What the relation between the two is has to be investigated in each separate case.

3) Creating an opposition between a politics of national interests and a *Verantwortungspolitik*, and therewith, between a *Realpolitik* and an *Idealpolitik* is fruitless. National interests are always intertwined with normative conceptions about how the economy, social relations, culture, the quality of life, the political order, etc. should be. Without such normative ideals of the 'good life', national interests could not be formulated at all.

4) We also need to rid ourselves of the neo-realist idea that national interests are objective, independently existing things out there, waiting to be discovered, and which can be found, at least when you do not suffer from a false consciousness, as Marx thought of objective class interests. But in this case the false consciousness is caused by the Second World War. The question for observers of foreign and international politics is not what are the national interests of a country, but how they are produced or constructed in the political and social sphere. Thus, we do not need a substantial description of the national interests but should instead focus on the specific kind of procedures which allow a country to formulate its goals and preferences, and translate them into practical political decisions and strategies. This change of perspective opens new fields of enquiry, such as: what are the institutional, political, social, cultural conditions under which a country resolves its national interests? What is the role of the media, what is the influence of interest groups, how are decision making processes in parties organised, and how are they organised in Parliament and in government, what is the role of individual personalities?, and so on, and so forth [Kühne 1996]. And these issues can be discussed on three levels:

- 1) The way in which the national interests or the goals of foreign policy are formulated;
- 2) The way in which they are defended in international negotiations and how the results are received within the country;
- 3) The way the national interests are served in more bureaucratic everyday decisions in, for example, Brussels.

From this perspective national interests are no longer objective and independent, but are results of societal and political processes. Therefore, it is necessary to integrate the field

of domestic and foreign politics. Until now they have been too greatly separated fields of research with their own specialists. The ahistorical logic in which national interests spring from the *Staatsraison*, and in which there is no societal influence, further strengthens this autism of the study of foreign politics.

To read, for example, Gregor Schöllgen's book *Die Macht in der Mitte Europas* it is possible to think that domestic factors have not played any role whatsoever in foreign politics [Schöllgen 1992]. The main causes for the two World Wars Schöllgen seeks in mistakes which, moreover, were made almost exclusively by Germany's neighbours. Moreover, this is not something to be found exclusively in works of right-wing historians. The SPD foreign policy specialist Karsten Voigt, for example, writes:

"Häufiger in seiner Geschichte erschien Deutschland als einzelner Staat seinen Nachbarn zu stark, so daß diese sich zu einer Koalition zusammenschlossen. Hier lag die Ursache für Spannungen und bewaffnete Auseinandersetzungen in Europa." [Voigt 1996].

The World Wars as a result of Germany's neighbours creating coalitions!

However, if you accept that domestic political factors were relevant in, for instance, World War One and Two, then a modern historian of foreign policy can no longer work within the *Primat der Außenpolitik*-paradigm. It is distressing to see how marginal the influence of the great debate in Germany about the *Primat der Innenpolitik* and the *Primat der Außenpolitik* has actually been on contemporary research of international relations. Many of the studies which are nowadays produced could, from a methodological point of view, also have been written a century ago.

'Normalität' and 'Sonderweg'

The second point I would like to discuss, but far more briefly, is the German concept of *Normalität*, a term which I have already touched upon several times. There are not many countries in the world in which people are so obsessed by the terms *Normalität* and *Normalisierung* as in Germany. Ultimately, the whole problem could be phrased in one small sentence: What does it mean to be German: to be different, or to be like others? This question immediately puts German history at the centre of attention.

Many, predominantly conservative, historians and political opinion makers fear that by incessantly singling out the period 1933-1945 Germany is putting itself in a permanent exceptional position. As a result, its abilities to act adequately are seriously affected and delimited. With purely negative statements such as 'We are the greatest criminals in history', a country is unable to create a national identity which is stable and can be trusted. Especially Michael Stürmer, the director of the *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik* in Ebenhausen, the political think-tank of the Federal Government in cases related to safety and foreign policy, in many publications warns of this distorted and unhealthy national identity and pleads for a *Wir-sind-normal-Nation* identity instead of a Holocaust identity.

In contributions on the position of the united Germany in international politics, the question of how to weigh the Nazi-period and its consequences for the question of 'normality' in German history, comes back in a surprising way. If, for example, Arnulf Baring, characterises the position of the new Germany in the international system of states, then he tells his readers that the unified Germany can best be compared with the Bismarck-Reich. To quote Baring: "We are back in the Germany created". Reunification and

the renaissance of the nation-state are for him in fact a belated victory for Bismarck and his creation of 1871. The continuity of the reunified Germany with Bismarck's makes for a reopening of many questions long thought of as closed: "Suddenly very old questions reappear, questions about the position of Germany in the middle of Europe, about the relationship between East and West". If we want to understand the current position of Germany in Europe, we should look at the German Empire of 1871 [Baring 1994: 1-20].

At first sight this comparison may seem reasonable, but in fact this historical parallel is highly problematic. International politics is nowadays completely different from a century ago. Just a few indications to think about: the role of international organisations such as the EU, UN, NATO, multilateralism, the role of non-governmental organisations, the effects of democratisation, the role of the media, economic interdependencies, the changed character of diplomacy, and so forth.

But if it is clear that no historical lessons can be drawn from the 19th century history, and that a comparison in fact hardly contributes to a better understanding of the contemporary position of Germany in Europe and the international systems of states, why then continue to repeat this comparison?

There is one important reason for it. By saying that the united Germany resembles the Germany of Bismarck, new continuities are pointed out in German history. In this changing perspective the historical weight of the Third Reich diminishes. It becomes a temporary disturbance of the German order which left no traces in the unified Germany. In the old Federal Republic the historical scope was far too narrow, and now it is time to shift our attention to other periods in German history.

In this sense, these comparisons can be seen as another move in the old debate of the place of the Hitler regime in German history, and what influence this period should have on the self description of German society, on images of identity, and on the question of which lessons history teaches for contemporary German foreign policy.

By creating new continuities the ideas about the German *Sonderweg* are also shifting. From the 1960's onwards left-wing, so-called 'critical' historians of, for example, the Bielefeld School, such as Hans-Ulrich Wehler and Jürgen Kocka, tried to show that Germany's route to modernisation, dating back to the nineteenth century, was quite different from the route other European countries had followed. This *Sonderweg* could explain why Hitler was possible in Germany. After the Second World War, the Federal Republic joined the other Western countries on the normal path of modernisation. Thus, the old Federal Republic is in this perspective normality, and one has to make sure that Germany, after the unification, will not leave this path of western orientation. The title of an article by Jürgen Kocka at the end of 1990 says enough: "*Nur keinen neuen Sonderweg. Jedes Stück Entwestlichung wäre als Preis für die deutsche Einheit zu hoch*" [Kocka 1990].

However, if one claims that after unification Germany regained its normality, and one points out the continuities between Bismarck and present-day Germany, then the old Federal Republic suddenly becomes a *Sonderweg*, which comes to an end with the unification. The foreign politics of the old Federal Republic is part of this *Sonderweg*, and therefore, cannot be a guideline for the new foreign policy of the new Federal Republic. The *Westorientierung* of West Germany is no longer self-evident. The normal position of Germany is in the centre of Europe, its *Mittellage*, and this geopolitical fact must be constitutive for the German *raison d'état*, her national identity and political agenda. In a book edited by Rainer Zitelmann, reflections on Germany as a Central European country

sometimes lead to an undisguised anti-western attitude and anti-Americanism [Zitelmann, Weißmann and Großheim 1993].

Therefore, we face the paradoxical situation that during the old Federal Republic people from the left were criticising western capitalism, the militarism of the NATO and American imperialism and now they are the greatest defenders of this 'good old' Federal Republic to which they look back in nostalgia, whereas some conservatives, who were used to defending Western institutions, are now distancing themselves from the West.

To conclude, in this critique of a few central concepts figuring prominently in the German debate on the new foreign policy, I have tried to show that the discussions in fact can be seen as a continuation of the endless debate on German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and German national identity. Because the participants in the discussion are so concerned about the question of how Germany should deal with her past, their contributions are mostly prescriptive and normative in character. The discussion contains a great deal of *Nabelschau*. However sensitive Germans may be to the attitude of neighbouring countries towards Germany, in the discussion on the new foreign policy one looks in vain for proposals which include, or at least, take into account the discussions, objectives and strategies of the other European countries. As long as this autism continues we cannot expect a new coherent concept of a post-Cold War foreign policy.

TON NIJHUIS is associate professor of history at the University of Maastricht in the Netherlands and research co-ordinator of the Germany Institute in Amsterdam. The paper was written during a stay at the Institute for Human Sciences in Vienna.

References

- Baring, Arnulf 1991. *Deutschland, was nun?* Berlin.
- Baring, Arnulf (ed.) 1994. *Germany's New Position in Europe: Problems and Perspectives*. Oxford and Providence, RI: Berg.
- Baring, Arnulf 1997. *Scheitert Deutschland? Abschied von unseren Wunschwelten*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt.
- Berger, Stefan 1995. "Historians and Nation Building in Germany after Unification". *Past & Present* 148: 187-222.
- Berger, Thomas U. 1997. "The Past in the Present: Historical Memory and German National Security Policy". *German Politics* 6: 39-59.
- Gillesen, G. 1994. "Germany's Position in the Centre of Europe: the Significance of Germany's Position and Misunderstandings about German Interests". P. 31 in *Germany's new Position in Europe. Problems and Perspectives*, ed. by Arnulf Baring. Oxford and Providence, RI: Berg.
- Glötz, Peter 1990. *Der Irrweg des Nationalstaats. Europäische Reden an ein deutsches Publikum*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt.
- Habermas, Jürgen 1995. *Die Normalität einer Berliner Republik*. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp Verlag.
- Hacke, Christian 1996. "Nationales Interesse als Handlungsmaxime für die Außenpolitik Deutschlands". S. 3-13 in *Deutschlands neue Außenpolitik. Band 3: Interessen und Strategien*, Hrsg. von Karl Kaiser und Joachim Krause. München: Oldenburg.
- Kocka, Jürgen 1990. "Nur keinen neuen Sonderweg. Jedes Stück Entwestlichung wäre als Preis für die deutsche Einheit zu hoch." *Die Zeit* 19. 10. 1990.
- Kühne, Winrich 1996. "Multinationale Friedensmissionen und nationale Interessen". S. 15-28 in *Deutschlands neue Außenpolitik. Band 3: Interessen und Strategien*, hrsg. von Karl Kaiser und Joachim Krause. München: Oldenburg.

- Markovits, Andrei, Simon Reich 1997. *The German Predicament. Memory and Power in the New Europe*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.
- Maull, Hans W. 1997. "Zivilmacht Deutschland". S. 63-76 in *Friede machen*, hrsg. von Dieter Senghaas. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag.
- Paterson, W. E. 1996. "Beyond Semi-Sovereignty: The New Germany in the New Europe". *German Politics* 5: 181-182.
- Pulzer, Peter 1995. "Nation-State and National Sovereignty". *Bulletin German Historical Institute* 17, no. 3: 5-14.
- Schöllgen, Gregor 1992. *Die Macht in der Mitte Europas: Stationen deutscher Außenpolitik von Friedrich dem Großen bis zur Gegenwart*. München: Beck Verlag.
- Schöllgen, Gregor 1993. *Angst vor der Macht. Die Deutschen und ihre Außenpolitik*. Berlin, Frankfurt am Main: Ullstein.
- Schöllgen, Gregor 1994. "National Interest and International Responsibility. Germany's Role in World Affairs". Pp. 45-47 in *Germany's new Position in Europe. Problems and Perspectives*, ed. by Arnulf Baring. Oxford and Providence, RI: Berg.
- Schwarz, Hans-Peter 1994a. "Germany's National and European Interests". Pp. 108-123 in *Germany's New Position in Europe. Problems and Perspectives*, ed. by Arnulf Baring. Oxford and Providence, RI: Berg.
- Schwarz, Hans-Peter 1994. *Die Zentralmacht Europas: Deutschlands Rückkehr auf die Weltbühne*. Berlin: Siedler.
- Smith, G. et al. (eds.) 1996. *Developments in German Politics* 2. Basingstoke: Houndsmills.
- Voigt, Karsten 1996. "Das deutsche Interesse am Multilateralismus." *Aussenpolitik* 47: 108-109.
- Winkler, H.-A. 1997. "Postnationale Demokratie? Vom Selbstverständnis der Deutschen". *Merkur* 51 2, nr. 575: 171-176.
- Zitelmann, Rainer, Karlheinz Weißmann, Michael Großheim (eds.) 1993. *Westbindung: Chancen und Risiken für Deutschland*. Frankfurt/M., Berlin: Propyläen.